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## WHY SEEK GOD'S BLESSING?

Psalm 67

By

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## Why Seek God's Blessing? Psalm 67

I've never met anyone who has answered "no" to the question, "Do you want God's blessing on your life?" Maybe some hard core atheists would be daring enough to say no. But I'd guess that deep inside, they would feel uneasy, even if they kept up a calm front. You'd better be *very* sure that God does not exist before you brazenly say, "I don't want His blessing"!

Since we all want God's blessing, you may find the title of this message to be rather strange: "Why Seek God's Blessing?" Isn't it obvious why we should seek God's blessing? We want to be happy! We want to enjoy life! We want things to go well with us and our children! But without adding something, those are not adequate reasons why we should ask for God's blessing. Psalm 67 tells us,

We should seek God's blessing so that our gladness in God  
will spread to all the nations.

Although this is a short psalm, it is an important one. Those who wrote the liturgy for the Church of England appointed this psalm to be read in every worship service (Charles Simeon, *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible* [Zondervan], 5:490; original published in 1819-1820). The psalm reflects the blessing that the Aaronic priests were to pronounce on Israel (Num. 6:24-26), "The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace."

But also this psalm is rooted in God's covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3), "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Psalm 67 is also the Old Testament expression of Jesus' instruction to us, that we are to pray (Matt. 6:10), "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Although

Paul does not specifically cite Psalm 67, he cites other similar Scriptures to justify his calling to preach to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9-12). So the theme of the psalm is a major theme of the Bible: We should seek God's blessing so that our gladness in God will spread to all the nations.

As you know (if you've come here for any length of time), our church puts a priority on world missions. We can rightly say, missions is not *a* program in the church. Rather, it is *the* program of the church. But it is important to keep in mind what John Piper has stated so clearly. He begins *Let the Nations be Glad!* ([Baker Academic], second edition, p. 17), "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man." He adds (*ibid.*), "The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God." Also, he points out (p. 20), "All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white-hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the earth."

Psalm 67 has a chiasmic structure, where verses 1 & 2 are parallel to verses 6 & 7. The opening two verses are a prayer for God's blessing. The conclusion is a prophetic fulfillment of that prayer. Verses 3 & 5 are identical prayers for all the peoples to praise God. Verse 4, the hinge verse, is a prayer for the gladness of the nations in God as they submit to His righteous rule and sovereign guidance. But rather than following this structure, I built this message around three practical points:

1. We should seek God's blessing.

While we all would quickly say that we want God's blessing, it is not automatic. We must diligently seek it. The Bible is abundantly clear that God is ready to pour out His blessing on His people, but only when we order our lives rightly before Him and seek God Himself as the supreme blessing. Note four things:

- A. God's blessing is rooted in His grace.

"God be gracious to us and bless us" (67:1a). Do you pray that often for yourself, your marriage, your children, and for this church? We all desperately need God's grace and His blessing. God's grace is one of the most basic concepts to grasp if you want to experience His blessing, and yet it is not easy to grasp in practice

because it runs contrary to our sense of fairness and justice. All of life programs us to work hard to earn what we get. Also, our pride tells us that we deserve to be rewarded because we worked hard. It's only fair.

But God's grace humbles our pride, saying, "You deserve My judgment, but I'm going to give you My favor." Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the man who went into the marketplace early in the morning and hired workers to go into his vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). He agreed to pay them a denarius for their day's labor. Mid-morning, he hired more workers and promised to pay them what was right. He did the same thing at noon and mid-afternoon. Finally, an hour before sundown, he hired more workers.

When the day's work was over, the men lined up for their pay. The owner began with the last group and gave them all a denarius for their hour of work. When the men came who had worked all day, they expected to get more, but each of them also received one denarius. They grumbled at the landowner and accused him of not being fair. But he told them that he had given them what they had agreed on. If he wanted to be generous with his money towards the others, what was that to them?

Grace means that we get blessings that we do not deserve. We can't earn grace or it becomes a wage, not grace (Rom. 4:4-5). We deserve God's judgment for our sins, but He gives us a free pardon and eternal life through Jesus Christ who paid our debt. The Christian life from beginning to end depends on God's grace. We received Christ because of God's grace; we walk in God's grace (Col. 2:6). We enjoy all of God's blessings because of His grace that He ordained for us in Christ (Eph. 1:3-6).

But grace is not easy to receive because our pride makes us think that we earned or deserved it. To receive God's grace, you must humble yourself and acknowledge that you are a sinner, deserving His judgment. You admit your helplessness. You ask God for something you can never earn—His grace and His blessing.

B. God's blessing means that we enjoy His favorable presence.

The psalmist continues, "and cause His face to shine upon us" (67:1b), literally, "among us." This comes out of the Aaronic

blessing and is a theme in several other Psalms (31:16; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135). To have God's face shining on us is the opposite of a scowling or angry face. To have His face shining towards us is the opposite of having Him turn His face away from us with indifference or disgust (these observations from James Boice, *Psalms Volume 2* [Baker], p. 546). It means to have His smile or favor upon us.

An old Jewish comment interprets God's face to be that of Messiah (Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Psalms* [Loizeaux Brothers, p. 264]. Thus Charles Simeon (*ibid.*) interprets the prayer of Psalm 67:1 to be for the advent of Messiah to His people and His manifestation to all the world. God's face would shine on His people in the person of Christ, who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.

At the end of Psalm 67, which ties back into the beginning, the psalmist repeats the name of God three times in connection with His blessing: "God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us..." This emphasizes that we cannot separate God's blessings from God Himself. *He* is the blessing, to have *Him* as *our God*. You can have everything that the world counts as blessings, but if you don't have God, you are not truly blessed. And, you may not have anything that the world counts as blessings, but if you have God and His smiling face in Christ, you are still truly blessed.

### C. God's blessing is not just individual, but corporate.

The blessings prayed for here are "to us." The pronouns are plural. The prayer is for God's chosen people to be blessed. The aim of God's blessing (which we will look at in a moment), that His way and salvation would be known among all nations, cannot be accomplished by individuals working independently, but only by His people together.

I often encounter American Christians, who think that they don't need the church. Often they've been hurt or disappointed by the church. They're afraid that if they get involved closely with other Christians, they'll get hurt again. So at best they attend church like they attend the theater, coming and going without getting to know anyone very well. Or, at worst, they avoid the church altogether and get the teaching they need from the Internet or radio. But the Bible is clear that we cannot experience God's full

blessing if we isolate ourselves from His people. And His blessing will not go from us to the nations unless we are strong as a church. And if God's blessing does not go to the nations through us, we are not helping fulfill His purpose of being glorified among every people group.

Thus, God's blessing is rooted in His grace. His blessing means that we enjoy His favorable presence, not just individually, but corporately.

D. We will experience God's blessing when we align ourselves with His purpose for the nations.

John Piper explains this well ([http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1993/853\\_Let\\_the\\_Nations\\_Be\\_Glad/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1993/853_Let_the_Nations_Be_Glad/)):

There is another point implied in this main one: if God blesses his people for the sake of the nations; then God is most likely to bless us when we are planning and longing and praying to bless the nations. If God wants his goods to get to the nations, then he will fill the truck that's driving toward the nations. He will bless the church that's pouring itself out for unreached peoples of the world. And this blessing is not payment for a service rendered; it's power and joy for a mission to accomplish. When we move toward the unreached peoples, we are not earning God's blessings, we are leaping into the river of blessings that is already flowing to the nations.

So we must never limit seeking God's blessing to selfish requests: "God, bless me with a wife and children and a house and a better car and a good job, so that I will be happy." Those things may be legitimate requests, but the prayer should be that God would bless you with those things so that you and your family and all of your belongings may be used to further God's glory among the nations. It's the principle that Jesus stated (Matt. 6:33), "But seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Seek God's blessing for the sake of the nations.

2. When we have God's blessing, we will be glad in Him.

True gladness and joy is found in God. Gladness in stuff is futile, because stuff can be taken from you in an instant (Matt. 6:19). But gladness in God is eternal; it cannot be taken from you.

The prayer of this psalm is all about praise and gladness and singing for joy in the Lord (67:3-5). Note two things:

A. We cannot export gladness in God to the nations if we are not glad in God.

John Piper (*ibid.*) puts it like this, "If we are not real and deep and fervent in our worship of God, we will not commend him among the peoples with genuineness. How can you say to the nations, 'Be glad in God!' if you are not glad in God?" We can't honestly pray (67:3, 5), "Let the peoples praise You, O God," if we are not people of praise. So (as I said in a recent message on Psalm 36), join George Muller, who made it the first business of every morning to secure happiness in God through time in God's Word and prayer. To repeat what A. T. Pierson said of Muller (*George Muller of Bristol* [Revell], p. 257), "He taught that God alone is the one all-satisfying portion of the soul, and that we must determine to possess and enjoy Him as such."

B. We cannot expect the nations to be glad in God if they do not know Him.

The psalmist prays (67:2), "that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations." If people worship gods of their own making or imagination, then the One True God will not be praised. To sing His praises, people must know Him as He is revealed in His Word. They must know His ways and His salvation. And, as Paul asks (Rom. 10:14-15a), "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?" And, as Paul also says (2 Cor. 4:4-6), they will not be able to understand the good news about Christ unless God opens their eyes.

So, pray for God to raise up workers for the harvest (Matt. 9:37-38). Pray for faithful people to send them through generous support and prayer. And pray for God to break through the spiritual darkness with His light, opening blind eyes to see the glory of the Savior whom He sent.

Note, also, in this regard that a major cause of the gladness and joy of the nations is (67:4), "For You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth." At first

glance, those sound like reasons for the nations to cringe in fear, not to be glad and sing for joy! But, the psalmist is assuming that the nations have come to know God's salvation. When you know God and His salvation, His righteous judgment and His sovereign guidance of the nations is a cause for joy, not for fear or alarm.

God's judging the nations with uprightness means that He will right every wrong and punish all that have ruthlessly oppressed innocent people. The evil dictators down through history will stand before the Judge of the universe and receive just punishment for their crimes. All that have known God's salvation and have been persecuted for it will be vindicated and spend eternity in indescribable joy in God's presence.

God's sovereign guidance of the nations is also a source of joy and comfort for those that know His salvation. If we did not have the repeated assurances of God's Word, we might conclude that the nations are spinning out of control in their evil ways. Christians are slaughtered, imprisoned, or displaced from their homes in many countries. We might be tempted to wonder, "Is God really guiding these evil nations?"

But Scripture is clear that even if God gives a nation over to the consequences of its evil ways (Acts 14:26; Rom. 1:18-32), it is still under His sovereign control, because He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). Paul said that God determined the nations' "appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). God "changes the times and epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings" (Dan. 2:21). "He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan. 4:35).

The proud, rebellious nations may think that they are sovereign, but the Bible is clear that God alone is sovereign. And when the nations come to know God's sovereignty and His righteous judgment, it is a source of great gladness and joy. And when we, as His people, have the blessing of knowing His ways and His salvation, we will be glad in Him. Finally,

3. When we are glad in God, we will want to spread that gladness to all nations.

The psalm begins with the prayer that God will be gracious to us and bless us so that the nations might know His salvation, so that they will praise Him and be glad in Him. Then it ends with the same prayer, now fulfilled by faith (67:7), "God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him." This implies...

A. Satisfaction in God overflows towards others.

Praise by its very nature begs to be expressed and shared. If you see a spectacular sunset at the Grand Canyon, you want to tell others about it. Your enjoyment of it spontaneously overflows into praise. And if you enjoy God and the blessings of His salvation, you want to share the joy (which is the *ultimate* joy!) with others, so that they can enjoy Him too. Even if it costs us financially or costs the pain of being separated from our loved ones or even if it costs our lives, it increases our joy and God's glory to take the gospel to the unreached nations.

In November, 1858, John Paton and his new bride Mary landed in the New Hebrides Islands, home to fierce cannibals. Three months later she gave birth to a son. But three weeks after that, she died of complications from childbirth and then the baby died also. Paton was devastated, but said that fellowship with Jesus sustained him through his intense loneliness (*John G. Paton Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], pp. 79-80).

Mary's last words were, "Oh that my dear mother were here! She is a good woman, my mother, a jewel of a woman." As she spoke, she did not realize that a fellow missionary had heard her. When she saw him she said, "You must not think that I regret coming here, and leaving my mother. If I had the same thing to do over again, I would do it with far more pleasure, yes, with all my heart" (*ibid.*, pp. 84-85). Today, due largely to the lifelong efforts of Paton and other faithful missionaries, those islands (now called Vanuatu) are approximately 75 percent Protestant Christians (*Operation World, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition*, by Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk [WEC International], p. 669). Needless to say, there are no more cannibals there! Paton's parents, by the way, were joyous to see their son go, although they knew they probably would never see him again in this life (p. 57).

B. God blesses us materially so that we can bless others spiritually.

“The earth has yielded its produce” (67:6) means that God had blessed Israel materially. The reason is given (67:7), “God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.” Israel’s material blessings translated into spiritual blessings on the nations. When God blesses us materially, it’s not so that we can squander it on selfish living. Rather, we should use God’s material blessings to bless the nations by sending and supporting those that take the message of His salvation to those who have yet to hear. To invest in the gospel for the nations is to invest in eternal joy for them and for yourself. It is to glorify God by spreading your joy in Him to all the earth.

### Conclusion

I conclude by asking three questions to help you apply this:

ü *Are you seeking God’s blessing for yourself, your family, and this church?*

You should be! It is only when you experience the blessings of God’s gracious salvation that you will be glad and sing for joy in Him. And it is the overflow of that joy that will bless the nations. So take the time daily to rejoice in the Lord through His Word. Examine your heart and judge all known sin. Ask God to bless you spiritually and materially so that you can bless the nations.

ü *Are you asking God to instill in your heart and in the hearts of your children a burning desire for the nations to be glad in Him?*

This is Mother’s Day. The greatest thing mothers and fathers can do for their children is to model for them and instill in them God’s purpose to be glorified among the nations. Read them missionary stories. Read the Global Prayer Digest. Pray for the nations.

ü *Are you being a good steward of God’s material blessings, so that you can use them to bless the nations?*

Get out of debt. Live simply. Give joyously and generously to the Lord’s work. Your gladness in God will spread to all the nations for His glory and their joy!

## Application Questions

1. Seeking God's blessing could result in selfishness, where we squander those blessings on ourselves. How can we avoid this?
2. John Piper says (*Let the Nations Be Glad!* p. 227, italics his), "*The pursuit of joy in God is not optional. It is our highest duty.*" Agree? Why/why not?
3. Should we wait to give to missions until we feel that we have experienced God's blessing, or is giving one way to experience His blessing?
4. In America, with all of our material blessings, how can we determine how much to give to missions? What principles apply?

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